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ABSTRACT

Three major dictionaries designed for learners of English as a second language are reviewed, their elements and approaches compared and evaluated, their usefulness for different learners discussed, and recommendations for future dictionary improvement made. The dictionaries in question are the "Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary," the "Longman Dictionary of Contemporary Usage," and "COBUILD," the Collins dictionary with a completely new defining style. Elements considered include treatments of pronunciation and grammar, layout, coverage (including geographical terms and proper names, new words, specialist terms, idioms, and Americanisms), and the language used for defining terms. Areas suggested for improvement or consideration in future dictionary development include the treatment of likely learner misconceptions about words and the information given about frequency and collocational range of words in use. Each dictionary is seen as having important advantages for different learner groups. (MSE)

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WHICH DICTIONARY? A REVIEW OF THE LEADING LEARNERS' DICTIONARIES

INTRODUCTION

Lexicographers are fond of complaining that, to the general public, 'the dictionary' is an infallible, unchanging arbiter of all lexical information. It is supposed that the average dictionary user accepts unquestioningly whatever information his or her own dictionary has to offer - even to the extent of rejecting as non-existent those particular forms not covered by it. If this has been the case in the past, lexicographers shouldbe pleased that the situation is changing, at least as far as non-native speaker dictionaries are concerned. Hornby's Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD) reigned unchallenged from 1948 to 1978, when the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) was first published, but since then many other learner's dictionaries have come on the market (often cheaper and more portable alternatives to OALD and LDOCE, but with some new and interesting features) and now we have a much-changed new edition of LDOCE, and a further rival in the form of COBUILD, the Collins dictionary with a completely different defining style.

This paper will look in detail at the three major learners' dictionaries mentioned above in an attempt to answer the following questions :

Which dictionary is to be recommended to which type of student?

What positive features of all three existing dictionaries can be incorporated into dictionaries of the future?

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A FEW BASIC FACTS

All three dictionaries are available in both hard and softback editions :

OALD	hardback	£9.75	paperback	£7.45
LDOCE	hardback	£9.50	paperback	£6.50
COBUILD	hardback	£12.95	paperback	£7.50

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All three have also spawned smaller versions of themselves, and in the case of OALD and LDOCE also pocket versions.

It would be useful at this stage to consider numbers of headwords in each dictionary, but it is difficult to compare wordlists, as LDOCE and COBUILD have main entries for many phrasal verbs, derivatives and compounds where OALD only has subentries. According to the publishers' blurbs, OALD lists 50,000 headwords and derivatives, LDOCE 56,000 words and phrases and COBUILD 70,000 references, but these estimates are very much open to interpretation. For example, in a recent review (March 1988) Fay Carney claims that 'a rough count of the number of entries in COBUILD gives a mere 40,000 headwords.' I shall be considering the issue of coverage later on in this review.

What else, apart from dictionary entries, do you get for your money? A considerable section of both OALD and LDOCE ~~are~~ is not, strictly speaking, dictionary at all. OALD has 70 pages serving as a guide to its use, and also giving grammar and encyclopaedic information. Not only can you find verb patterns, lists of irregular verbs, contractions, affixes and common abbreviations, and a guide to letter-writing, but also exhaustive notes on all types of numerical expressions, weights and measures, and the pronunciation of common forenames, geographical names and counties. How many OALD users know that it lists the works of William Shakespeare, and the books of the Bible?

I suspect that any new edition of OALD will sacrifice some of these lists, but, like bus-services to outlying areas, they are surely necessary to some users, and only OALD supplies the need.

LDOCE is almost as thorough, with an even larger introduction and appendix, 77 pages in all. The complex grammatical codes which caused so much confusion have been simplified in the new edition, but despite this the new LDOCE introduction and guide to using the dictionary is 10 pages longer

than the old one. LDOCE, too, carries lists of numbers, weights and measures, irregular verbs and so on. It has an appendix on word-formation with suffixes and affixes listed in alphabetical order, and a guide to the pronunciation of geographical names. The old edition of LDOCE had even more, including an 'Animal Table'. New LDOCE also has twenty language notes incorporated in the body of the dictionary, covering both grammatical issues (gradable and non-gradable adjectives, words followed by prepositions etc.) and language functions (apologies, requests, invitations, etc.). Both OALD and LDOCE make liberal use of illustrations; there are claimed to be 500 extra in the new edition of LDOCE. COBUILD, in contrast, has only 17 pages of non-dictionary. This is not to say that it makes no use of the kind of 'dictionary-ese' that must be explained to the user, indeed it covers much the same grammatical ground as LDOCE, and uses similar, but not identical, abbreviations. However, COBUILD does not explain its 'special entries' in any great detail at the front of the book. Instead notes on grammar abbreviations are listed in their appropriate alphabetical order within the dictionary. LDOCE and COBUILD have presumably responded to adverse criticism of the weighty old-edition LDOCE introduction by interspersing their ordinary dictionary entries with information on dictionary use. I am not sure if this is a good idea. It creates the illusion, particularly in the case of COBUILD, that the dictionary is easier to use (look! no long introduction to read!), but the explanations would probably be easier to find, and learn, if they were all grouped together. LDOCE's language notes are almost impossible to find without reference to the table of contents, and might just as well be placed outside the body of the dictionary.

Perhaps future dictionary makers should be working towards a compromise between the OALD separate listing approach and the COBUILD dictionary entry approach. Clarification of abbreviations, for example, which

dictionary users frequently require (according to Bejoint's 1981 survey), are probably found more quickly if they are placed within the fullest coverage in OALD's appendix. We still have next to no evidence of how learners use their dictionaries, but it seems likely that separate appendices encourage dictionary browsing but frustrate the user in urgent need.

One more, and quite significant point for would-be buyers: COBUILD has no illustrations. I will discuss the implications of this later on.

PRONUNCIATION AND GRAMMAR

Learners' dictionaries are immediately distinguishable from dictionaries solely intended for native-speaker use because they give much fuller information about the way words are pronounced, and their likely syntactic environment.

There are inherent problems with any dictionary pronunciation guide, because a dictionary cannot really teach anybody how to pronounce the sounds of the language. It assumes that the user can already do this, and will be able to pronounce new words by relating the symbols to the sounds he/she already knows.

In practice, of course, this does not always happen, but the only way that the dictionary can improve its service is by providing finer distinctions, and possibly acknowledging variations from RP. All the dictionaries use IPA. OALD lists the symbols in the inside front cover, LDOCE in the introduction, and also in a handy separate card, and COBUILD, less handily on page 12 of the introduction. In addition, both LDOCE (new edition only) and COBUILD adopt specia

symbols or superscripts to give extra information about unprotected vowels, and the effects of the phonological environment. The 20 superscripts in COBUILD include 10 numbered schwa - perhaps too fine a detail for many users to appreciate - but there is no symbol to indicate linking /r/ before a word beginning with a vowel in such cases as AMATEUR. Both LDOCE and OALD allow for linking /r/.

OALD tends to be more prescriptive in its treatment of pronunciation, giving one pronunciation only, where LDOCE and COBUILD offer alternatives. OALD's pronunciations also sometimes strike one as old-fashioned - with /sju/ for SUE, where COBUILD gives /su/ and LDOCE lists both forms as alternative BritE and AmE pronunciations. Although in the introduction to COBUILD it is made clear that the citation forms are not necessarily the forms to be found in context, stress patterns at specific entries are presented as being invariable. None of the dictionaries allow for stress pattern changes resulting from syntactic conversion, as in the case of UPSTAIRS adj and UPSTAIRS adv.

OALD and LDOCE are explicitly linked to work on the grammar of English; OALD draws on Hornby's studies, particularly those relating to the behaviour of verbs, while LDOCE has a companion volume in the Grammar of Contemporary English (Quirk et al 1972). In contrast, COBUILD emphasises that 'the extra column does not constitute a grammar of English which can be separated from the rest of the dictionary' (Introduction). (It should be noted, however, that the COBUILD database can be consulted as a computerized descriptive grammar, and contains a great deal of grammatical material.) COBUILD seems anxious to present itself as an easy-to-use dictionary, with none of the frightening codes users have come to associate with LDOCE. However, no learner's dictionary can ignore the conventions of grammar and COBUILD does provide essential grammatical information within boxed 'grammar notes' in the body of the dictionary. In the meantime, the grammar

of the new edition of LDOCE has been much simplified with respect to the earlier edition. The result of this is that COBUILD and LDOCE converge quite remarkably in the type and extent of the grammatical information they give.

Some of the information dropped from the new edition of LDOCE may be missed. For example, none of the dictionaries now note those adjectives where either method of forming the comparative and superlative is possible. However, the information that remains is now more clearly stated, and LDOCE's treatment of adjectives almost, but not quite, matches that of COBUILD. OALD is much more modest in its grammar coverage, with most of its grammatical information concentrated on verb patterning.

One feature of the COBUILD style is that examples play an important role in conveying syntactic information to the user. There are underlying problems with this approach, because it is not always clear to the user how much information given in the example is significant information. Do the surrounding words in the example reflect collocational restrictions, or are they merely there to help carry the meaning? An example of this can be found at the entry for SEE, where OALD gives explicit collocational advice - 'often with can, could' but COBUILD (and, in this case LDOCE) relies on an example to suggest this to the user.

It should also be pointed out that COBUILD lists all inflections of the headword in full, whereas OALD and LDOCE only mark irregular forms.

LAYOUT

The compilers of COBUILD have made much of the organizational differences which distinguish COBUILD from OALD and LDOCE. The differences are apparent on every page; COBUILD has incorporated an 'extra column' in order to avoid 'interrupting the flow of entries with abbreviations and technical

terms' (COBUILD, Introduction). COBUILD entries tend to be longer, unabbreviated, and all inflected forms are listed at the headword. All this can be seen at a glance, but there are other, perhaps more important, differences between all three dictionaries which could influence a prospective buyer's choice.

Each dictionary chooses its headwords differently. At the entry for PICK, for example, OALD lists three headwords: first two nouns, plus idioms and compounds such as PICK AXE and ICE-PICK, and then the verb plus idioms and phrasal verbs such as PICK AT, PICK OFF and PICK ON. LDOCE makes the same basic division between nouns and verb, although the verb is listed before the two nouns here. LDOCE places idioms and phrasal verbs at the headwords for PICK, but accords PICK- compounds headword status and lists them at the appropriate alphabetic slot. ICE-PICK and TOOTH-PICK are also cross-referenced. COBUILD has only one headword PICK. Nominal and verbal meanings, though indicated in the extra column, are not grouped together, and all compound forms including phrasal verbs follow on as headwords.

It is largely a matter of taste which of these approaches you prefer, but each style has a number of cosequences for the user:

*In the case of COBUILD and LDOCE, which list compounds separately, compounds and derivatives may appear at a distance from their parent word.

*OALD and LDOCE divide nouns and verbs, which makes for fewer alternative definitions at each entry. In a recent study of look-up tactics Newbach and Cohen (1987) point to multiple definitions as a particular stumbling block, quoting the student who comments 'I didn't go on after the first definition. I thought all the rest were just examples'. There appears also to be some psychological justification for dividing nouns and verbs, as evidence from studies of aphasic subjects, native speaker word associations

and semantic errors all suggest that nouns and verbs are but loosely bound in the mental lexicon (cf Aitchison 1987). Dictionary users who are able to distinguish word classes should be able to find the appropriate definition more quickly when entries are divided accordingly. *COBUILD does not list separately words with the same form but different syntactic function, and thus, in theory at least, the dictionary user need have no grammatical knowledge in order to make a search. However, users who do know what part of speech they are looking for cannot speed up their search because word meanings are sequenced in order of their frequency of occurrence in the COBUILD corpus, and the same word class may occur at several different levels of the entry. In her review of COBUILD (1988) Fay Carney comments 'the layout... can be trying when looking for a particular use of a highly polysemous word: to find the adjective use of SET, for example, you have first to scan 27 of the 38 senses'.

* OALD and LDOCE also give separate entries for homographs belonging to the same word class when 'there is no historical connection between the two words and their meanings are completely different'. (LDOCE Guide to the Dictionary). This makes for shorter entries, but is also a confusing practice as users will not usually know a word's origin and meaning before they look it up! Even lexicographers cannot agree at what point difference in meaning justifies separate entries. For example, OALD has three entries at TIP while LDOCE has eight, and within the same dictionary inconsistencies appear, with CLUB in the senses of 'a society' and 'a thick heavy stick' sharing the same entry in LDOCE (cf Rundell 1986).

* Cowie (1980) suggests that decoding is quicker if compounds and idioms have separate entries, whilst for encoding purposes it is better if semantic links are made clear by listing under component elements. Clearly it is not practicable to adopt both policies within the same dictionary: COBUILD's mixing of verbs and nouns enables some semantic links to be

demonstrated, but links between headwords and compounds and phrasal verbs are not so obvious. It is worth noting that the practice of providing separate entries for compounds and certain other forms enables LDOCE and COBUILD to claim a higher number of headwords than OALD.

Linked to these considerations is the question of how derivatives are treated in the dictionaries. OALD tends to follow the Oxford tradition and subsumes many derivatives under the main entry, using the tilde. This could be misleading if the derivative relates to one specific meaning of the parent word, but OALD does have a numbering system to avoid this problem (see OALD's entry for INTERESTING).

LDOCE gives most derived words a separate entry, but has a defining practice similar to that of OALD. Definitions are circular, for example INTERESTING - 'that takes (and keeps) one's interest; POSITIVELY - 'in a positive way'. However, the new edition of LDOCE, unlike the old, has a numbering system which relates derivatives to one particular definition of the parent word.

COBUILD aims to deal with derivatives more thoroughly. Undefined derivatives are given at individual senses of the word, rather than at the end of the total entry. Derived forms are given headword treatment if they are seen to take on an idea or meaning not present in the parent word; hence HAPPILY, ANGRILY, BEAUTIFULLY, HOPELESSLY appear under the adjective entry, while ENORMOUSLY, HOPEFULLY, HIDEOUSLY are given headword status. Some rather arbitary decisions seem to have been made in this respect, and there is also some apparent redundancy, as in the case where derivatives relate to the parent word in one sense but not in another. Thus POSITIVELY, WILDLY and some others appear several times under the entry for the adjective and are also entered as separate headwords.

The COBUILD team are very aware of the independent stature of many derived forms :

> 'often, particularly with the commoner words of the language, the individual word forms are so different from each other in their primary meanings and central patterns of behaviour (including the pragmatic and stylistic dimensions) that they are essentially different 'words'.'
>
> (Sinclair and Renouf 1988)

In fact, the treatment of morphological pairs with different functions is remarkably similar in all three dictionaries, where CERTAIN/CERTAINLY, EASY/EASILY, NEAR/NEARLY, REAL/REALLY and others all receive separate definitions.

Perhaps because of the thorough way in which its entries are treated, COBUILD does not list all derivational possibilities. Many adjectives are listed without their adverbial or nominal derivations. SHORT, for example, is defined in 26 ways, but without SHORTNESS, while OALD and LDOCE, using the tilde for brevity, can afford to include it. For decoding purposes, it could be argued that many derivational forms are transparent. If 'short of breath' is given, 'shortness of breath' can be deduced from context. But the encoder needs to be given derivational forms. Why not 'shortity' of breath? Whitcut (1986) gives the example of transparent 'ungraceful' :

> 'if you start trying to encode the opposite of graceful you may end up with disgraceful'.

(None of the dictionaries does in fact give 'ungraceful').

COVERAGE

It is customary, in reviewing dictionaries, to check their coverage of certain types of entry - new words, perhaps, or words that are uncommon or register-specific. The problem when reviewing several dictionaries simultaneously is that patterns rarely emerge from this type of search. All dictionaries have surprising inclusions and omissions, and many hours can be spent fruitlessly searching for the 'best' coverage of a particular

type of word. Moreover, whether a word is listed or not is only a tiny part of the story, its subsequent treatment by the dictionary is far more important, and it seems to me that from the learner's point of view more information on fewer words is preferable to a wide but shallow coverage.

Those who need to recommend dictionaries for specific groups of learners could follow Yorkey's practice in his review of LDOCE (1979), by checking dictionary coverage against a page or two of appropriate reading material (Yorkey used Time Magazine). I simply searched for words in particular categories - geographical and proper names, new words, specialist terms, idioms and Americanisms, in an attempt to discover differences which might influence the user's choice of dictionary.

Geographical terms and Proper Names

None of the dictionaries include the names of towns and countries as dictionary entries, but they do give rather patchy coverage of geographical adjectives, generally choosing those which have a further, non-geographical sense. For example, DUTCH appears in all three, AUSTRALIAN only in LDOCE and COBUILD, AUSTRIAN only in COBUILD, CONGOLESE in none. LDOCE seems to supply the fullest range and is the only one to include CARIBBEAN, UKRANIAN, COSSACK, CHILEAN, TANZANIAN and more. Appendices to OALD and LDOCE give full lists of geographical names and their corresponding adjectives with pronunciation, and LDOCE explains that 'this list.....is included to help advanced students reading contemporary newspapers and magazines'. The lack of any systematic treatment of geographical terms in COBUILD is to be regretted, although it is presumably part of a policy-decision to exclude encyclopaedic information in favour of high-frequency words.

COBUILD also lacks entries for proper names and associated adjectives. There are no entries for SCROOGE (LDOCE and OALD) or MICKEY MOUSE or MAN FRIDAY (LDOCE only). OALD gives the best coverage of adjectives from

'scholarly' names : NEWTONIAN, SHAKESPEARIAN, SHAVIAN and SOCRATIC, for example (OALD only).

New Words

Although OALD has not been re-edited since 1974, it is regularly revised. To the latest (1987) revision have been added many new words, such as ACID RAIN, AIDS and some computer terms (although there are no new-technology illustrations). COBUILD does not seem to be quite so up to date; presumably this is because the corpus from which words were taken considerably pre-dates the dictionary. It includes ACID RAIN and AIDS but does not list YUPPIE/YUPPY (LDOCE only) and fails dismally on the new computer terminology which one might expect dictionary-users to need. It does not even include DISK-DRIVE and USER-FRIENDLY, which are listed in both LDOCE and OALD. MOUSE, JOYSTICK (computer-sense), DESKTOP, SPREADSHEET, and HANDS-ON occur only in LDOCE, which also includes labelled diagrams of a computer and a typewriter, and an illustration of a compact disc player.

Specialist Terms

None of the dictionaries makes any claim to cover specialized language use, but I searched for some of the terminology of Applied Linguistics on the grounds that learners might well encounter these words while studying English. All the dictionaries listed COLLOCATION, none NOTION/NOTIONAL and FUNCTION/FUNCTIONAL in their technical sense, nor ANAPHORIC nor CONSTITUENT STRUCTURE. On the whole, those Applied Linguistics terms which were listed occurred in OALD and LDOCE rather than in COBUILD. These included MORPHEME, ALVEOLAR, LEXIS and READABILITY (OALD and LDOCE only) and IPA and VELAR (LDOCE only).

Idioms

Idiomatic language use is likely to be particularly problematic for the language learner; in Bejoint's survey (1981) idioms fell into the category

of items most frequently consulted by dictionary users. Dictionary coverage of fixed expressions is discussed by RJ Alexander in his article 'Fixed expressions in English: reference books and the teacher' (1984). Alexander examined 13 reference works for their coverage of 20 fixed expressions, and found that both OALD and LDOCE fared extremely well, giving only slightly less complete coverage than works expressly concerned with idiomatic use, such as the Longman Dictionary of English Idioms. OALD listed 13 of the 20 test expressions, LDOCE 12, but OALD also listed five of the expressions twice, under different headwords, in an attempt to solve the look-up problem of such expressions as 'kick the bucket'.

Both new-edition LDOCE and COBUILD scored higher when I applied Alexander's test. LDOCE listed 13 and COBUILD 17 of the fixed expressions, and although neither dictionary provided double entries, COBUILD cross-referenced 5 of the expressions and LDOCE cross-referenced 8. A cross-referencing system enables the user to look up the expression at either of two headwords, while avoiding the redundancy of a double entry.
(For full details of Alexander's test see appendix.)

Americanisms

No dictionary as yet deals comprehensively with regional varieties of English, but treatment of American variations on standard English is important for many dictionary users. The three dictionaries I examined were unequal in their coverage of American alternatives, with LDOCE giving the most and COBUILD the least complete treatment. All three dictionaries covered spelling variations (humour/humor, travelled/traveled, etc.) and they also covered the more familiar differences in meaning (Brit E v AmE pavement, biscuit, etc.). However, only LDOCE systematically lists the American alternative to British pronunciation; OALD only covers those words where the pronunciation differs significantly from RP, and COBUILD gives no alternative pronunciations at all.

In some semantic fields American and British English diverge almost entirely - words for parts of the car, for example (the car having been developed at a period when transatlantic contact was at its weakest) and words for much of the equipment in the kitchen. These large-scale differences are best dealt with by the illustrations in LDOCE and OALD. Lacking illustrations, COBUILD cannot present the members of a lexical set together. The OALD illustration under MOTOR labels 20 parts of the car, three are given with their American equivalents. LDOCE under CAR gives a diagram with 41 different labels, 19 of which include an American equivalent.

DEFINING LANGUAGE

When LDOCE was first published in 1978 its greatest selling point was its use of a simplified defining language. The definitions and the examples in the dictionary were written in a controlled vocabulary of about 2000 words, with the intention that they should be easier to understand than OALD definitions.

Some reviewers queried this. For one thing, the defining vocabulary was based on West's General Service List of English Words, claimed to be 'the only frequency list to take into account the frequency of meanings rather than the frequency of word forms' (LDOCE Introduction). This meant that some of the words in the defining vocabulary were not particularly high-frequency words, and might not be known to dictionary users. For example, BACTERIA, ASHAMED, COWARDLY, INFECTIOUS and WORM are all words in the LDOCE controlled vocabulary.

It was also felt that meanings were difficult to express when vocabulary was restricted, and that this led to rather clumsy paraphrases which were actually longer and more difficult to understand. An example of this is

the entry for LAVA, defined in the old edition of LDOCE as 'rock in a very hot liquid state flowing from an exploding mountain' (viz MacFarquhar and Richards 1983). The rather ludicrous alternative to VOLCANO has been avoided in the new edition of LDOCE, which makes fuller use of non-restricted words and does not paraphrase them. Some oddities do remain, however, with STEAK, for example, defined as a 'piece of meat from cattle' because BEEF is not one of the controlled defining words (viz Hanks 1987).

Any judgement about how easy to understand a dictionary definition is must be subjective, because insufficient research has been carried out into dictionary use. One survey, however, does seem to suggest that users perceive LDOCE definitions to be easier than OALD definitions. MacFarquhar and Richards (1983) asked 180 subjects for their judgement on the way three dictionaries defined 60 test words. Their conclusion was that 'subjects.... judged definitions from the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English to be the clearest 51.5% of the time, from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 28.5% and those from Webster's New World Dictionary for 20% of the entries'. The experiment was limited both because of the smallness of the sample size and because the subjects were not required to apply what they read in the dictionaries in any way, but it does give very positive results for LDOCE and suggests a clear difference in defining style between the learners' dictionaries and the native-speaker dictionary, Webster's New World.

Restrictions on defining vocabulary aside, LDOCE and OALD have a similar defining style. They belong to the dictionary writing tradition whereby it is possible (with minor inflectional and pronominal alterations) to substitute the dictionary definition for the word to be defined without altering the meaning of the text (viz Whitcut 1986). It is obvious at a glance that COBUILD definitions are not reciprocal in this way. Their discursive style means that they cannot be lifted bodily and substituted

for the entry word; instead they are more like the spoken explanations that a teacher might give in the classroom (were he or she sufficiently well-informed!).

This style is perceived by some as being more 'user-friendly'. Tadros, for example, in her review of COBUILD (1987) responds warmly to the style :

> 'Anyone who consults the dictionary will realize that items are not, as in other dictionaries, explained in a detached way, but will feel that there is a real concern for them as users'.

No-one can yet say with certainty how dictionary-users feel about it, because this kind of research has not yet been carried out. We should take into consideration one or two points, however :

* The discursive style does mean that COBUILD entries are marginally longer than those in the other two dictionaries.
* Dictionary-use is a study skill, which, once learnt, can be applied to other reference works. It could be argued that COBUILD users will not get such a good preparation in dictionary-reading as a skill, because the COBUILD style is unique.
* Students of Literature, Linguistics, and possibly some other subjects sometimes cite dictionary definitions in their own writings. COBUILD definitions are often insufficiently succinct for this purpose.
* The COBUILD defining style is intended as a model of good written English. The COBUILD team aimed 'to create a dictionary that would not merely help readers in decoding texts, but that would hold up models that would be of assistance to learners in encoding English' (Hanks 1987).
* Although the COBUILD definitions themselves are written with the non-native speaker in mind, the examples, which are real instances of language use from the COBUILD corpus, are often difficult and obscure. This was a conscious decision on the part of the COBUILD team, defended by Fox (1987) with reference to the COBUILD example for CIVILLY 'I made my farewells as civilly as I could under such provocation'. Fox argues 'many teachers would

dismiss this as a bad example because it is difficult. We would argue that its very difficulty makes it a good example for the word it is exemplifying, because it is typical of how the word is actually used'.

* OALD examples have, for the most part, been made up by the dictionary writers. They are therefore more self-contained, although in many cases it is difficult to imagine how they would fit into a longer text. They are examples of 'usage' rather than 'use'.

* Some, but not all, LDOCE examples are attested instances of use stored in a computer corpus. The examples are fairly self-contained and simple although the controlled defining language is no longer used for this part of the definition.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Immense amounts of time and effort have gone into the making of all three dictionaries. Features that reviewers might criticize have, in fact, been carefully planned by the compilers, always with the intention of creating a better dictionary that meets the needs of the learners more completely.

And the effort continues. New editions of learners' dictionaries will appear on the market in years to come. In what ways can dictionaries of the future improve on the existing editions, and what can be learnt from OALD, LDOCE and COBUILD?

One possible area for improvement is the treatment of likely learner misconceptions about words. It is not unusual for learner lexical errors to be apparently condoned by the learners' dictionaries, because the dictionary writers have not realized that such an error might occur, and have chosen to give examples of typical use but not warnings against typical misuse.

For example, in many languages only one word covers the meanings expressed in English by MATURE and RIPE, yet none of the three dictionaries guard the reader against producing expressions such as 'a mature apple'. The same problem occurs when OALD and COBUILD list the first meaning of CASUAL as 'happening by chance', thus condoning an error such as 'the casual thunderstorm' (viz Nesi 1987). (New edition LDOCE lists the 'chance' meaning of CASUAL last, and labels it 'now rare').

Knowledge of collocational range is clearly necessary to avoid these types of error, and the examples in COBUILD are very carefully chosen to indicate appropriate collocations. But how is the learner to know whether the collocations of a given word are restricted to those of the example? COBUILD's defining style suggests either a wide collocational range - 'When something matures...' or a narrow one - 'When a child or young animal matures....'. Semi-restricted collocation would probably best be indicated by some sort of negative marking along the lines of 'not with fruit'.

Perhaps dictionary makers of the future will also be able to improve on present systems of register labelling. 'Formal' and 'informal' are over-used by all three dictionaries, and do not convey sufficient information to the user. For example, there are many formal situations where 'set fire to' or 'light' would be more appropriate than 'ignite' (marked 'formal' in LDOCE) yet the difference between the words is primarily one of register.

So far, research into dictionary use has been designed to tell us what users expect from existing dictionaries, rather than what they really need to know. Dictionary-makers of the future will have to investigate learners' needs more closely; COBUILD has already broken away from the traditional dictionary format, and future needs-oriented dictionaries may be still more unconventional in their approach.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the conclusions that Bejoint arrived at in his 1980 survey of dictionary use was that 'most students prefer the dictionary they have bought, or the one they usually work with'. It takes some time to get to know a dictionary, and students tend to get the most out of the one they have used most often. Teachers, too, are best able to advise with reference to the dictionary they know best.

For this reason, many users will stay with OALD. Its reputation passes by word of mouth from one generation of students to the next, and many students will have already consulted OALD before they ever buy a monolingual English dictionary of their own. OALD also seems to carry authority in a way that its rivals do not, perhaps because of its family resemblance to the Oxford English Dictionary.

Teachers and learners who wish to start afresh, however, with one copy or a whole set of learners' dictionaries, will be choosing between new edition LDOCE and COBUILD. The choice is a real one. Both books have much to offer, and both offer slightly different things.

COBUILD's 20 million word database means that it can provide a great deal of attestable new information about the frequency and collocational range of English words in use. It prides itself on its coverage of words as they appear in different contexts, and it gives fuller information of this kind than either of the other two dictionaries. It seems to me that COBUILD is best for immediate encoding and decoding, particularly when the user is relatively unsophisticated and cannot cope with grammar codes and abbreviations. LDOCE on the other hand, would seem to function better as a vocabulary <u>learning</u> tool. It offers more information on antonyms and lexical sets, at the entry itself, in the appendices, and in the appealing diagrams which cannot fail to catch the user's eye. Much of the material in LDOCE is more suitable

for browsing - or a straight read - than it is for immediate application in the decoding or encoding process. LDOCE language notes constitute a mini textbook in themselves, which could be fleshed out to form the basis for classroom work.

OALD, too, provides plenty of browsing material, and the most thorough of the three for encyclopaedic information.

Perhaps one of the main distinctions between COBUILD on the one hand and LDOCE and OALD on the other is that COBUILD concentrates on distinguishing between words, whereas LDOCE and OALD put a great deal of emphasis on the identification of groups of words that have features in common. Which approach is preferable depends on what the user wants to do, and the enlightened learner might be well-advised to buy all three dictionaries, for use according to the mood of the moment.

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